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Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

TIMMER, ANDRIA D. and ELIZABETH WIRTZ, 2022, *Gender, Power, and Non-Governance: Is Female to Male as NGO is to State?* New York: Berghahn Books, 298 pp., ISBN 978-1-80073-460-9

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Timmer and Wirtz' *Gender, Power, and Non-Governance* consists of case studies into the gendered dichotomy of the feminized NGO and the masculinized State and how this binary is reaffirmed, strengthened, and challenged. Using Sherry Ortner's female/male nature/culture analogy to orient the book, Timmer and Wirtz successfully introduce how the patriarchal State occupies power and policies that are "dominated by, centered around, and defined by men or masculine ideologies" (11). Alternately NGOs are feminized due to the nature of work they provide (healthcare, education, feminist issues, etc.) and largely women populate the employees, volunteers, and beneficiaries of NGO aid. In their Introduction, Timmer and Wirtz both highlight the complexities, nuance, and intricacies of this male/female divide and discuss localized engagement with these topics in three carefully crafted sections.

The first section engages the "Patterns of Reproduction," where even attempts to break out of binaries or work outside of them does nothing to change or unsettle the power structures and hierarchy of gender in NGOs (29). In Chapter 1, Alexandra Crampton unsettles the dichotomy by explaining how the NGO becomes male and the state becomes female through gerontological interventions. Because NGOs have had to advocate and frame aging as a social problem for the State, Crampton shows that NGOs often have to push the state to assume care and responsibility for populations. Because elder care is historically feminized Crampton asserts that the masculinized State is often resistant to taking up the issue thus the need for NGO advocacy. In Chapter 2, Christopher Loy explains that with the Ainu, an indigenous group in Japan, NGOs were carrying out the function of the state by pushing the assimilation of the Ainu. Simultaneously, NGOs were also pushing against assimilation, employing the international Indigenous framework, highlighting that opposites may exist in NGO advocacy. This duality is due to the current political and legal leanings of governments, thus for the success of NGOs and the populations they serve NGOs must engage meaningfully with the current social climate. Lastly, Amanda J. Reinke shows in Chapter 3 the ways in which an NGO in the processes of United States Alternative Justice movements previously pushed more feminized practices based on flexibility, empathy, and care. Yet, in a more business-focused, action-based shift, they are taking on more masculine qualities like updating ID cards, conducting background checks, and working through paperwork. Thus, through the work, the NGO aligns more closely with the legal system and bureaucratizing qualitative data. In doing so, NGOs collude with the State for economic benefit thereby becoming reliant on their support, but seemingly also aiming to undermine State control in marginalized communities. Ultimately, all three chapters in this

section highlight that while trying to complicate the gender binary of State/NGO, organizations often unintentionally play into these categories.

The second section, “Care Work as Feminized Work,” highlights the feminized workforce of NGOs. In Chapter 4, Tess Altman, and in Chapter 5, Smita Mishra Panda and Annapurna Devi Pandey, explore how the devaluation of women’s labor has now opened a political alternative for women to critically engage with NGO work and advocacy. Andria D. Timmer in Chapter 6 explains that love as an intervention is an actionable way to complete work when there are policy and money constraints due to neoliberalism. Yet often, this act of love is a form of emotional labor and is feminized, placing the care on the NGO “mother” (151). Closing out the section, Yang Zhan in Chapter 7 discusses how the Chinese government has created the ideal communist soldier which has now been gendered and transformed into feminizing NGO workers and volunteers. Specifically focusing on the feminization of NGO work through the lens of “nurturance” this section highlights just how deeply confined NGO work may be when gendered. Often it is relegated to more “acceptable” feminine work including aid, poverty alleviation, and relief. By discussing the feminization of work and limiting factors for NGOs in this section, it is evident that Ortner’s framework of State/NGO Male/Female impacts the reception of NGO work around the world.

In the last section of the book, the authors work to queer the dichotomy. Binaries are only productive to an extent, and by blurring the State/NGO, Male/Female the authors are able to show localized queer realities while highlighting that nongovernmentality is *still* devalued and less powerful than its government counterpart. Mark Schuller begins this queering in Chapter 8, discussing the “drag” the Haitian state puts on to assume NGO features while still acting as the State. While it did not give up the masculine government, it did instead bend to donors for aid in rebuilding efforts post-hurricane. In Chapter 9, Alejandra Wundram Pimentel highlights in Guatemala how trans individuals bolster their identities to grant them services and recognition by the State when their citizenry is denied. Similarly in Chapter 10, while advocating for queer political action Tamar Shirnian discusses that by working *outside* of NGO structures, a queer collective in Armenia was able to do more transformative work than its similar NGO counterpart which instead had to work within the system. Concluding queering with a discussion of the liminality that stateless forcibly displaced people, Elizabeth Wirtz discusses the hierarchies of power that complicate queering. While queering may occur, because hegemonic boundaries only controlled by States are maintained, it requires an entire restructuring of the heteropatriarchy we all live under.

This text provides a wonderful addition to the literature on humanitarian interventions and NGOs and how gender may be engaged within this context. Each chapter provides a fruitful discussion of contextual and localized NGO and State inter/in-action. Through accessible language and approach, the book is suited for a large audience of NGO workers, volunteers, and academics of all levels alike. Yet, when considering NGO workers and volunteers as well as applied anthropologists the one drawback of the book is that it exists as a snapshot. It highlights a singular moment of engagement with literature, theory, and case studies. It does not provide actionable ways that we may disentangle the heteronormative State with feminized NGO work. It is instead up to the singular authors to call action or the reader to create avenues in their mind of how they can effect change. Despite this, I believe that through these strong chapters, readers

across all different disciplines may see their own work within the pages, understanding how they might dismantle our gendered governing processes.

Gender, Power, and Non-Governance is a gripping read that highlights the intricacies of NGO work and the engagement within and outside gender binaries. The book may inspire NGO workers and volunteers as well as anthropologists to engage with the gendered structures of government, and non-governance alike, around them. By understanding the State/NGO Male/Female framework and its queered realities, we may see more examples in the future of work within, outside, and differently from the State/NGO realities of today.

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